

# Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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# NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

## I N D E X

Volume 12

(The figure within brackets after the titles denotes the number of the issue, and is followed by page number)

### Authors' Index

- Ara, Jamal. Pied Crested Cuckoo in Bihar (7): 12  
-----, The avifauna of Horap - a small isolated Reserved Forest in Bihar (11): 6
- Bhatt, Vijay see Parikh, Vipin
- Creado, Winston. 'Strange Thrushes, Turdus unidentifiabilis' (7): 12  
-----, Ornithological observations (12): 5
- De, Ge. Vihar Lake, Borivali National Park (7): 5
- Dharmakumarsinhji, R.S. Indo-German bird sanctuary (11): 10
- D'Souza, Neela. Birdwatching on Malabar Hill (9): 1
- Fleming, Robert L. Birds around Tiger Tops Hotel, Chitwan district, Nepal (7): 1
- Futehally, Zafar. Confrontation among Koels (8): 8  
-----, Whitebreasted Waterhen (9): 10  
-----, Ruddy Sheldrake in the Borivali National Park (12): 11
- Gauntlett, F. M. Kaziranga for birds (1): 4  
-----, A field Key for the Genus Phylloscopus (3): 5
- Ghorpade, K. D. On woodpeckers and other matters (2): 9
- Gole, Prakash. Turnstone (Arenaria interpres) in Poona (11): 12
- Grubb, Robert. The Common Grey Hornbill in the Gir Forest (4): 6
- Jackson, Peter. A daysworth of Delhi birds (12): 1
- Jadeja, Sursinhji. Owlets. How Swamiji was save confrontation with a tiger (8): 11  
-----, Familiarisation with birds (12): 7

- Jameson, Mrs. Saran. Redstart (2): 15  
 ----- Bird notes from Nilgiris (6): 10; (8): 10  
 ----- ' Birds of Jamshedpur ' (8): 12
- Johnson, J. Mangalaraj. The heronry at Koonthakulam, Tirunel-  
 veli dist, Tamil Nadu (8): 1
- Kacher, Lavkumar J. Birds in urban environments (1): 8  
 ----- Regional news: Gujarat (4): 5  
 -----, Shivraj Kumar. Nesting of the Paradise Flycatcher (10): 10
- Lokaranjan, Brig. R. Nesting colony of pelicans in Andhra Pra-  
 dash (3): 11  
 ----- Delightful distractions (11): 1
- Madansinhji of Kutch. The Houbara (7): 9
- Mancher, Datta. Survey of pesticides (1): 9
- Mangalik, A. A trip to the Elephant pond (10): 4
- Martin, Owen. Miking with birds (2): 9  
 ----- Dual nationality (10): 1
- Mitra, Ananta. A tree that attracts birds: Muntingia calabura  
 (1): 15  
 ----- A few birds at Digha (9): 9
- Mukherjee, R. N. The Monal Pheasant (8): 13
- Nair, K. N. Blackwinged Kite nesting in Kerala (10): 3
- Narayanaswami, V. Birds of Jamshedpur (6): 4  
 ----- Vedanthangal (12): 10
- Navarro, S.J., A. Taped impressions (1): 1  
 ----- Birdwatching at Arnala Island, Bombay (5): 3
- Neelakantan, K. K. The pelicanry at Kolamuru (4): 1  
 ----- In memoriam Kolleru pelicanry (8): 7
- Neginhal, S. G. Birds of the Dandoli sanctuary (2): 1  
 ----- Trema orientalis (2): 18  
 ----- Tungabhadra reservoir birds (5): 6  
 ----- Arrival of White Wagtails (12): 11
- Palkhiwalla, B. A. Does a leafing peepal attract insectivorous  
 birds? (3): 9  
 ----- Rufousbacked Shrike (Lanius schach) (3): 12  
 ----- Roosting flight (5): 12
- Parikh, Vipin & Vijay Bhatt. Winter visitors at Bandra (1): 15
- Rana, B. D. & A. P. Tyagi. Birdwatching around Muzaffarnagar,  
 Uttar Pradesh (6): 1
- Raol, Lalsinh M. A puzzling bird. A new record? (5): 2
- Saini, Sohan Singh. Screaming of peacock heard in the Himalayas  
 (5): 11
- Sen, S. K. Birdwatching from a train (6): 5

- Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) fishing (7): 10  
 The rains and birdlife around Bombay (8): 9  
 Nesting of the Baya Weaver bird (Ploceus philippinus) (10): 11  
 Arrival of Blyth's Reed Warbler (Acrocephalus dumetorum) (12): 12  
 Shukla, B. M. Birds at Mt Abu (7): 3  
 Singh, Kameshwar Pd. Crows as destroyers of mosquitoes (1): 15  
 Smith, Ann Talbot. Birds in a Bengal garden (3): 11  
 Stairmand, D. A. Brevity in names (1): 11  
 Out on the prowl again (2): 17  
 The Indian Courser (3): 4  
 An afternoon's birding near Mysore City (4): 4  
 Birds seen on two mornings in the Botanical Gardens, Ootacamund (5): 8  
 Winter visitors at Mahim Creek (5): 11  
 The Indian Pitta and the Blue Chat (6): 7  
 The Indian Pitta arrives on schedule in Borivali Park, Bombay (6): 11  
 Vedanthangal (7): 6  
 Birding near Ooty (8): 4  
 A summer week-end in Khandala (9): 5  
 Pre-monsoon breeding of the Baya (Ploceus philippinus) (9): 12  
 Roosting flight: with a discourse on the Reef Heron (10): 6  
 Early morning on a Khandala hillside (11): 3  
 Some common birds in the Koregaon Park area, Poona (12): 8  
 Tyagi, A. P. see Rana, B. D.

## Review

- Guide to the Bird Gallery. Madras Govt. Museum (3): 9  
Minutes of the Tenth Annual General Meeting held in January 1971 (2): 12

## Regional Index

### Himachal Pradesh

- Peacock in Kulu Valley (5): 1  
 Monal Pheasant in Simla Hills (8): 13

### Nepal

- Birds around Tiger Tops Hotel, Chitwan dist (7): 1

### Uttar Pradesh

- Birds around Muzaffarnagar (6): 1

New Notes for Birdwatchers Vol. 12 - Index

Delhi

A daysworth of Delhi birds (12): 1

Bihar

Birds of Jamshedpur (6): 4; (8): 12

The avifauna of Horap (11): 6

West Bengal

Birds seen from a train (6): 5

A few birds of Digha (9): 9

Rajasthan

Birds at Mt Abu (7): 3

Gujarat

Gir Forest (4): 6

Indo-German bird sanctuary (11): 10

Assam

Kaziranga for birds (1): 4

Maharashtra

Arnala Island, Bombay (5): 3; Vihar Lake, Borivali, Bombay (7): 5; Malabar Hill, Bombay (9): 1; Khandala (9): 5; (11): 3; Koregaon Park area, Poona (12): 8

Mysore

Dandeli sanctuary (2): 1; near Mysore City (4): 4; Tungabhadra reservoir (5): 6

Tamil Nadu

Nilgiris (6): 10; (8): 10; Botanical Gardens, Ootacamund (5): 8; near Ooty (8): 4

Index of Special Topics

Heronries and Pelicanries

Pelicanry in Andhra Pradesh (3): 11; at Kolamuru (4): 1; at Kolleru (In Memoriam) (8): 7. Heronry at Koonthakulam, Tirunelveli dist, Tamil Nadu (9): 1; Vedanthangal (7): 6; (12): 10

General

Crows as destroyers of mosquitoes (1): 15; Woodpeckers (2): 9; Indian Courser (Cursorius coromandelicus) (3): 4; Rufous-backed Shrike (Lanius schach) (3): 12; Indian Pitta and the Blue Chat (6): 7; Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis) fishing (7): 10; Confrontation among Koels (8): 8; Reef Heron (10): 6; Roosting flights (5): 12, (10): 6; Familiarisation with birds (12): 7

Breeding

Whitebreasted Waterhen (9): 10; Blackwinged Kited in Kerala (10): 3; Paradise Flycatcher (Terpsiphone paradisi) (10): 10; (11): 1; Baya Weaver (Ploceus philippinus) (9): 12; (10): 11

Field Identification

Key to the Genus Phylloscopus (3): 5

Food Plants

Muntingia calabura (1): 15; Trema orientalis (2): 18; Leafing peepal (3): 9; 'Birds in a Bengal garden' (3): 11

General

Taped impressions (1): 1; Survey of Pesticides (1): 9; Brevity in (bird) names (1): 11; Miking with birds (2): 9; Out on prowl again (2): 17; A new record? (5): 2; 'Strange Thrush' (7): 12

Migration

Winter visitors at Bandra, Bombay (1): 15; at Mahim Creek, Bombay (5): 11; Dual nationality (10): 1; White Stork (Ciconia ciconia) (11): 10; Recovery of B.T.O. ringed Tufted Duck (Aythya fuligula) in W. Pakistan (11): 11; Ruddy Sheldrake (Tadorna ferruginea) (12): 11; Houbara in Kutch (7): 9; Pitta in Bombay on schedule (6): 11; Pied Crested Cuckoo in Bihar (7): 12; Blyth's Reed Warbler (Acrocephalus dumetorum) in Bombay (12): 12; Redstart (Phoenicurus ochrurus) in West Bengal (2): 15; White Wagtails (Motacilla alba) in Pondicherry (12): 11

Weather

The rains and birdlife around Bombay (8): 9

NEWSLETTER FOR  
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Volume 11, Number 12

December 1971

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CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| A daysworth of Delhi birds, by Peter Jackson                           | 1  |
| Ornithological observations, by Winston Creado                         | 5  |
| Familiarisation with birds, by Sursinhji S. Jadeja                     | 7  |
| Some common birds in the Koregaon Park area, Poona, by D. A. Stairmand | 8  |
| Notes and Comments   | 10 |
| Correspondence   | 10 |
| Vedanthangal, from V. Narayanaswami                                    |    |
| Arrival of White Wagtails, from S. G. Neginhal                         |    |
| Ruddy Sheldrake in the Borivali National Park, from Zafar Futehally    |    |
| Arrival of Blyth's Reed Warbler, from J. S. Serrão                     |    |

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A DAYSWORTH OF DELHI BIRDS

Peter Jackson

I am not a 'tick-hunter' - a compiler of lists of birds seen just for the sake of it. But there were many times when I took friends out around Delhi during the winter when we did tot up our score, and we often found that it was more than 100. Inevitably, I began to think of how many birds one could see in a day, and from our Delhi checklist I reckoned that it should be possible to top 150. The day was constantly put off until on 1 March 1970, I awoke with the realisation that I was leaving India in July, the winter was passing, and the chance might be lost for ever.

I got off to a quick start as I left the bedroom - our resident house sparrow sped across the living room to feed its nestlings on the top of the almyra. Before I was in the car I had the House crow, Green parakeet, Common and Brahmin mynas and the Pariah kite. As I turned down Prithviraj Road heading for Mahrauli, Blossomheaded parakeets flew alongside. I wished I had taken a portable tape-recorder to note birds while driving, but I had to keep the list in mind for the next stop.

December 1971

2

The first halt was at Mehrauli, where the dry stony landscape, the rocks and the ruins produced some 20 more species, including the Rufous-fronted wren warbler, the Blue rock thrush, Brown rock chat, Yellow-throated sparrow and Dusky crag martin. I had relied on - others noted could have been picked up elsewhere.

My route then went on to Gurgaon, noting Pale harrier, White-necked stork, White-eyed buzzard and Steppe eagle, among others, on the way. From Gurgaon I turned west, taking the old Farrukhnagar road via Dhankot to Sultanpur, a magnificent jheel which the Haryana Government has now far-sightedly turned into a Wild Bird Sanctuary. All along the road I had to stop to write down what I had seen whenever the list was getting too long to remember.

All those interested in birds in the Delhi area regretted the draining of the huge Najafgarh jheel. But in fact this probably led to the concentrations at nearby Sultanpur. Although shot over to some extent, its bare margins provided little cover for hunters and the water birds were relatively undisturbed. The flocks of Rosy pelicans and flamingoes were unmistakable and I sat down happily under a shady tree with a telescope to work over the various species of duck, geese, waders, herons and storks. By lunchtime my list was going well at 87. I would have liked to remain enjoying myself just watching at Sultanpur, but the Jumna had to be covered. I went back to Gurgaon by the same road, but this time took the road to Palam, where I turned east and crossed my morning route at Mehrauli, going on past Tughlakabad to the Mathura Road. From Madanpur a road runs down to the river at a point where the market gardens south of Okhla end. This was a good place to pick up species such as various terns, striated weaver, Pied myna, Purple gallinule, and, as a bonus, a Spotted dove, which is very uncommon in the Delhi area.

My plan to follow the cart-track by the market gardens to Okhla, which can be very productive, was foiled by some earthworks in progress and I had to speed round by the Mathura Road. I was now conscious that the Pied kingfisher, which I had reckoned one of the easiest to find, was not on my list. Surely, at Okhla ... No, not for me that day. A look at the ridge as the sun set yielded little, except one chuck, immediately noted as a nightjar. But no further chucks followed, and I had reluctantly to cross it off my list as uncertain.

It was dark coming through Chanakyapuri, but I paused at the crossroads near the American Embassy. I shone my spotlight into a tree. One of my Spotted owl friends did not let me down. He was at his nightly post.

I was home. My list totalled 128 - reduced to 127 when the nightjar was rejected.

And now a confession. My leap from bed that morning had not been as the first light of day spread over Delhi. I have to confess that it had been nine a.m. when I set forth - a shame-

December 1971

And time for a birdwatcher. I claimed the right to a full 24 hours, giving me to nine a.m. next morning. This time I was up with the dawn with a prepared list of species and a race down to the zoo. Not cheating! Delhi zoo attracts a fine selection of wild birds, and I was able to add several, including Stone curlew, Large pied wagtail, Night Heron, Coucal, and Whitebreasted waterhen. I was up to 141. A visit to the Ridge again produced the Goldenbacked woodpecker, Wood shrike and Whitecheeked bulbul -- 144. The minutes were ticking away. I was desperate. My garden still should have something. It did - I ticked off the Magpie robin, and as the second hand nudged up to nine a.m. I closed with the Redwhiskered bulbul.

I had failed - four short of my 150 target. I cannot say I sank back in depression. It had been an exhilarating chase, and I don't think anyone would say 146 represents a bad day's birding anywhere in the world.

In retrospect it seemed ridiculous not to have seen such common Delhi birds as the Darter, Pied kingfisher and White-eye, and even the Coppersmith, which regularly nested in my garden. On the other hand, species such as the Spotted dove and Pale harrier were not to be expected, and so it probably worked out about right in the end. Even so, I am sure that the 150 mark should be reached reasonably easily and perhaps pushed above 160, especially with more than one pair of eyes working together.

Was it my most exciting birdwatching asked for by the Editor? No, not really. I have had so many blissful days birding in India I could not really select one occasion, but I felt it worth recording as a mark for others to challenge. But I hope that 'tick-hunting' will not become in India the obsession it has become in some parts of the world -- birds have more to offer than being just marks on a list.

Bird species sighted around Delhi between 0900 on 1  
March 1970 and 0900 on 2 March, in approximate order  
of identification

- |                           |                                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. House sparrow          | 14. Ring dove                  |
| 2. House crow             | 15. House swift                |
| 3. Common myna            | 16. Crag martin                |
| 4. Brahminy myna          | 17. Neophron                   |
| 5. Green parakeet         | 18. Blue rock dove             |
| 6. Blossomheaded parakeet | 19. Redwattled lapwing         |
| 7. Robin                  | 20. Pied bush chat             |
| 8. Pariah kite            | 21. Rufousfronted wren warbler |
| 9. Black redstart         | 22. Tailor bird                |
| 10. Grey partridge        | 23. Jungle babbler             |
| 11. Common babbler        | 24. Masked wagtail             |
| 12. Green bee-eater       | 25. Whitebacked vulture        |
| 13. Little brown dove     |                                |

2. Yellowthroated sparrow
28. Green sandpiper
29. Redwinged bushlark
30. Lesser whitethroat
31. Blue rock thrush
32. Bank myna
33. Ashy wren warbler
34. Brown rock chat
35. Black drongo
36. Steppe eagle
37. Griffon vulture
38. Great grey shrike
39. Large grey babbler
40. Redvented bulbul
41. Baybacked shrike
42. Pale harrier
43. Indian roller
44. Blackbellied finch-lark
45. Painted stork
46. White-eyed buzzard
47. White-necked stork
48. Crested lark
49. Short-toed lark
50. Starling
51. Bluethroat
52. Stonechat
53. Short-toed eagle
54. Sarus crane
55. Longlegged buzzard
56. Indian pipit
57. Common swallow
58. Dusky redshank
59. Temminck's stint
60. Redrumped swallow
61. Little egret
62. Rosy pelican
63. Indian sandmartin
64. Black ibis
65. Shoveller
66. Skylark
67. Gullbilled tern
68. Stilt
69. Teal
70. Blacknecked stork
71. Spoonbill
72. Pintail
73. Barheaded goose
74. Gadwall
75. Wigeon
76. Grey heron

77. Coot
78. Indian pratincole
79. Brahminy duck
80. Spotbill
81. Flamingo
82. Ruff
83. White ibis
84. Whitetailed lapwing
85. Marsh harrier
86. Red turtle dove
87. Marsh sandpiper
88. Whitebreasted kingfisher
89. Whiskered tern
90. Blacktailed godwit
91. Avocet
92. Greenshank
93. Spotted sandpiper
94. Redshank
95. White wagtail
96. Purple sunbird
97. Kestrel
98. Yellow-wattled lapwing
99. Pond heron
100. Blackwinged kite
101. Tawny eagle
102. Blackheaded gull
103. Lesser egret
104. Striated weaver
105. Indian wren warbler
106. Cattle egret
107. Pied myna
108. Blueheaded yellow wagtail
109. Spurwinged plover
110. Blackbellied tern
111. Sandlark
112. Kentish plover
113. Wiretailed swallow
114. Little skylark
115. Masked wagtail
116. Brownheaded gull
117. Little cormorant
118. Spotted dove
119. Jungle crow
120. Purple gallinule
121. Tufted duck
122. Common pochard
123. Nukta
124. Redcrested pochard
125. Large cormorant
126. Green barbet
127. Tree pie

- |                          |                              |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 128. Rufousbacked shrike | 138. Whitebreasted waterhen  |
| 129. Peacock             | 139. Stone curlew            |
| 130. Nightjar - rejected | 140. Shag                    |
| 131. Spotted owl         | 141. Large pied wagtail      |
| 132. Large egret         | 142. Whitethroated munia     |
| 133. Blackeared kite     | 143. Goldenbacked woodpecker |
| 134. Moorhen             | 144. Woodshrike              |
| 135. Little grebe        | 145. Whitecheeked bulbul     |
| 136. Coucal              | 146. Magpie robin            |
| 137. Night heron         | 147. Redwhiskered bulbul     |

Total: 146 after rejecting nightjar

### ROUTE

0900/1.iii.70 - 27 Prithviraj Road to Mahrauli, to Gurgaon, and then via Dhankot to Sultanpur jheels. Return to Gurgaon. To Palam, Mehrauli, Tughlakabad, Mathura Road, Madanpur to Jumna bank. Back to Mathura road to Okhla, to Ridge, to 27 Prithviraj Road.

0600/2.iii.70 - 27 Prithviraj Road to Zoo, to Ridge, to 27 Prithviraj Road (0900).

### ORNITHOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

Winston Creado

The Vihar Lake area is a truly rewarding spot for Birdwatchers.

Upon the hilly approach road, one might in season observe Redrumped Swallows hawking insects, while within the park itself one encounters brilliant little Ioras, Mahratta Woodpeckers, etc.

During the monsoons when the periphery of the park is smothered in luxuriant vegetation, I have seen the Emerald Dove and flocks of Blyth's Whiteheaded Myna here; and from the din itself one gets a bird's eye-view of Bayas in lustrous breeding plumage at their nests in the date palms below.

Here too, I have seen the Indian Lorikeet, nibbling the golden buds of the peltophorum.

The winter months lure delightful visitors of this area. In October last year, I saw a rosefinch here. It was a bird of fiery crimson that glowered like a garnet from branch to branch of a silk cotton tree. I had always imagined rosefinches to be dull pinkish brown birds, but this one was as brilliant as an amandavat. It stayed on the same tree for so long, over an hour, that atlength I tired of watching it, but could not bear to tear myself away from it; so I went towards it, and it flew away, and I was free to leave at last.

Beneath the dam is a lush valley, carpeted with

threaded by a thoughtless stream, clogged with water hyacinth. Here are chloropses, minivets, yellow-eyed babblers, white-throated babblers, skulking amidst the water hyacinth, and the whitebreasted waterhen, which is extremely shy and scurries into the spiny palm thickets upon the slightest provocation.

Blackheaded orioles come here at evening to roost amidst the mango trees; and as one rounds a bend in the stream, one might chance to launch a startled kingfisher upon a trajectory of turquoise; a hint of sunrise fire in the dusky depths of a mango tree betrays the gleam of an oriole, and there is generally a flock of small minivets, cavorting amidst the leafless branches of some tree, the male scintillating like decrescent meteorites amidst the more conservatively clad females; until they take offence at one's approach, and scatter like an incandescent shower.

And here, one enchanted afternoon, I saw a verditer flycatcher, a lovely bird of seraph blue, that kept making frequent winged sallies into the air; it was much pestered by a bullying drongo that kept trying to bounce it off its perch each time it returned to it. Scarcely had it gone, when, on a neighbouring tree I espied an immature Paradise Flycatcher with chestnut streamers, and I was enthralled by its loveliness. I have never seen the silver-phased male, but I can well imagine how ethereal it must look as it glides, like a ripple of moonlight amidst the dusky forest glades.

And of course, there are always the little sunbirds that flit amidst the tree-tops, mercurial and remote, and all their jewelled lustres, fragmented in the fiery noon.

At Erangol, near Marve, I watched a pair of crested larks make their way across a field of stubble. The forward bird would every now and then pick up some tiny morsel and the following bird would immediately run up to it, and the former would then insert it into the bill of the latter. I do not think it was a case of an adult bird feeding a young one, as they both appeared to be mature and responsible adults.

That reminds me of a scene I witnessed in my garden, when I watched two adult mynas stuff a whole live garden lizard down the throat of a minor myna. Which brings me nearer home:

Once, whilst watching the bee-eaters clustered upon the casuarina's spire, I suddenly saw them scatter in a panic. A moment later, a shikra alighted upon the tree. This shikra has been frequenting the place for some time now. It often conceals itself in the crown of a coconut tree, when all the crows cluster around and start peering and jeering at it. I'm sure it will leave soon, as the crows allow it no privacy at all.

One afternoon I heard a curious reiterated call that sounded (at least to my diseased imagination), rather like a diabetic cat being given injections of vitamin B Complex, and I rushed out to find a grey cuckoo shrike in the casuarina tree.

Just the other day I saw a ...

garden. This is the first time that I have ever observed this species here, although one or two may be found in the mangrove swamps betwixt Juhu and Versova; the Whitebreasted kingfisher has however been a frequent visitor.

One night, about nine-thirty, my room was invaded by a family of three Whitethroated munias. They flew in through the open window, and one settled upon the floor, one amidst the plastic flower arrangement, and one upon the head of Aphrodite (for I am a sculptor, and my room is lined with Greek statues). They seemed to be in a state of shock, and would not utter a single word, but sat very still. At length they started to move a little. The one on the floor flew up to the lampshade, the one on Aphrodite's head to the outstretched arm of Hermes, and the one amidst the plastic flowers hopped onto the table and took a sip of water from the bowl in which my contact lenses were immersed. He seemed to enjoy the water which was flavoured with contact lense solution. In the end, they all lined up, three abreast upon the rim of the lampshade, and went to sleep. At about 3 p.m. I switched out the light, and they immediately flew out of the window, which was open all along.

However, the sight of that bird amidst my plastic flowers was so irresistible, that I immediately sat about making life-size models of a pair of finches, but instead of making them drab Munias, I made them glorious Gouldian finches; and these were rather successful, so I am now engaged in formulating a set of syrtthetic macaws (life-size), and one Leadbeater's Cockatoo, with its crimson crest and wings extended, to show the delectable pink underwings and tail.

I hope this little account satisfies the demand of several readers for 'Nocturnal' birds.

## FAMILIARISATION WITH BIRDS

Sursinhji S. Jadeja

While I was staying at Vasoji Plantation (property of Somnath Trust) situated just opposite the Diu Island I tamed a Peacock whom I named Gangaram. I used to feed him daily with a cupful of jowar grains held in my hand. This I did for 5 years.

At Sirohi (Rajasthan), I 'familizised' with Babbler (seven sisters) who used to eat from my hand, the powdered biscuits.

But the story of my familiarization with a Redwattled Lapwing is interesting.

In 1962, while I was in service with Somnath Trust as Manager of Somnath Estates, I got so familiar with a wild lapwing that my 12 year old grandson and I could scratch the head of the bird while he or she was hatching the eggs.

Considerable patience is required to tame the lapwing thus

After spotting the eggs, one should stand over then pretending to crush them. The mother bird will get tremendously agitated and fly over you menacingly trying to attack you with the typical Morse code Tee Teeting, language. After standing on eggs (between two feet), one should move away and sit down quietly 15 ft or so from the nest.

The bird will immediately return to the nest and sit on the eggs, apparently pleased that they have not been crushed. Then quietly get up and go away. Repeat this for three or four days. Every day try to go nearer and nearer the nest. When the bird realizes that you do not intend any harm, she will remain seated on eggs and allow you even to scratch the head.

I was able to tame these lapwings thrice using this method. Birds do respond to love.

#### SOME COMMON BIRDS IN THE KOREGAON PARK AREA, POONA

D. A. Stairmand

In almost 2½ years in Bombay I had never stayed in Poona until early March 1971. I had often had marvellous mornings birding along the Nasik and Ahmednagar roads amongst cultivation and stony, rolling grassland some way outside Poona and after those mornings I had once or twice passed through Poona but by then both the lady and I were hot, tired and dusty. However early last Saturday morning (6.iii) as I passed through the outskirts of Poona to Bund Garden I realised I had done the lady wrong. For I passed by attractive rivers and there were fine buildings, big gardens and lovely trees glistening in the cool morning sunlight. The lady was splendid.

Over the long weekend of 6-8.iii I stayed in Poona and strolled one morning and one evening around the Naylor Road and Botanical Survey of India area and along the small quiet roads of Koregaon Park, near Bund Garden, with their attractive buildings, bungalows and well-wooded large gardens. The most prominent trees in the area were banyans - some in ripe figs - and Neems in fresh leaf and flower. Surprisingly enough the evening session from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. was more full of birds than the morning one but both were wonderful.

The birds I saw were very much the ones I hoped (to 'expect' is, I find, fatal) to see but they were in far greater numbers than I dared hope. Banyans in ripe fig are, of course, always a great attraction for the Coppersmiths and these colourful, little birds were very common calling from tree tops - often fully exposed to view - or gorging figs. I heard a peculiar noise from one Coppersmith (was it a whirring or a clicking? I am sorry I can't say now as I was on a 'busman's holiday', so

ed this Coppersmith he mated with a female and thereafter offered her a fig which he had held in his bill. It is always pleasant to see chivalry in males and this offering brought to mind a male Large Green Barbet in Borivali Park, Bombay, giving a whole beakful of berries to a female after mating with her. Perhaps this Coppersmith was not so chivalrous with his one red fig as he was no less healthy than the Large Green Barbet had been. If I may be permitted to digress a bit further away from Koregaon Park and its birds on this theme of chivalry in birds I think two of the most charming instances of chivalry I have seen were of a male Spotted Munia last monsoon at Marve taking a beakful of long fairly dry grass onto a bough of a Gul Mohur whereupon a female joined him flirting her tail up and down. The male then discarded the grasses and a bout of 'kissing' ensued followed by copulation, then a further bout of kissing. But perhaps best of all were a pair of Common Babblers at the beginning of November on the scrubby surrounds of Chandola Talao, Ahmedabad. The birds were scurrying around like rats amongst small thorn bushes before the romance took place. After copulation the male Common Babbler managed to find a tiny faded and torn red flower from one of the bushes. The flower had seen better days but this was all the poor fellow could find and he laid it on the ground beside the female who was still squatting. I feared she might refuse this meagre offering but she picked it up and ate it delicately with great grace and charm.

In the Koregaon Park area Koels were frequently heard and more often seen. The males were easy to see and if one looked hard enough the odd female could be discovered crouching along boughs in amongst thick foliage. Roseringed Parakeets were eating seeds out of long pods and several of these birds were young with practically no tails. They looked like monster lorikeets. Those delightful birds the Grey Tits were in small parties enjoying a variety of diet and White-eyes were in larger parties, sometimes up to 30+ together, and they favoured Neem and the Drumstick trees, which were in flower. I was a little surprised there were not more Magpie Robins but there were several males voicing their song from vantage points on tree tops. Neither the Grey Tits nor the Magpie Robins were quite as dashing in dress as the former had been at Ooty in January or the latter are now in Bombay. This could hardly have been the result of environment, although the railway line is not far off. I did see Golden Orioles and the magnificent yellow of these birds was glorious against the fresh green leaves of the Neems. The Common Ioras were in breeding dress and they are not only very handsome and active little birds but they also have a good selection of musical calls. I was very lucky to see two male Purple Sunbirds in breeding dress singing away in full sunlight and showing off their yellow armpits, and what could be better? Other birds I saw included many firm favour-

December 1971

ites of mine - Indian Robins, Brahminy Mynas, Purplerumped Sunbirds, Ashy Wren Warblers, Tailor Birds, Redvented Bulbuls, Black Drongos, Large Grey Babblers, House Swifts, Green Bee-eaters, a Greyheaded Yellow Wagtail in summer dress attracted by insects near Grape Vines, and a Large Pied Wagtail (our very handsome faithful Wagtail) attracted by some running water.

In all I noted over thirty species of birds and the surroundings are perfect.

### NOTES AND COMMENTS

Dr Salim Ali completed his 75th birthday on 12th November. The Editor thanks the many members of our Club who responded to the Appeal and contributed to the Birthday Fund opened by the Bombay Natural History Society. Dr Salim Ali continues to be remarkably energetic and all Birdwatchers wish him continued good health for many more years.

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The Editor had hoped that he would receive many contributions from eminent ornithologists to whom he had written earlier in the hope that the December number would be a especially good one. We are glad that Mr Peter Jackson responded to this appeal. It is planned to reproduce his article on the Birds of Delhi in the form of a brochure, and distribute it widely in the Capital so that it can be a useful checklist for bird-minded visitors.

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A notice of the 11th Annual General Meeting to be held on Sunday, the 19th December 1971 at 5 p.m. at the Editor's residence at Juhu ~~Island~~, Andheri, Bombay, is being enclosed with this Newsletter. We hope that there will be a large attendance. We request those who will not be able to come to send in their suggestions.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### Vedanthangal

I went to the Vedanthangal Sanctuary on the 15th October. Unfortunately the Lake is absolutely dry and all I could see were a group of Little Cormorants (Phalacrocorax niger), some Openbilled Storks (Anastomus oscitans) and a lone Grey Pelican (Pelecanus philippensis). The Forester-in-Charge told me I had come too early in the season and that hopefully the Lake should be full by November, after which the birds should arrive! Some

December 1971

hundred Barringtonia saplings had been planted and the Forester was very confident that this time they should come up with all 'proper treatment'. But he was rather vague and short of ideas as to what this 'proper treatment' consists of.

I glanced through the official visitors' book with a view to reading Prof. K. K. Neelakantan's (referred to in the article 'Vedanthangal' by D. A. Stairmand, Newsletter 11(7), July 1971) but apparently that page had been removed and nothing of its whereabouts could be obtained from the Forester. I propose to pay another visit in November.

V. Narayanaswami  
Mylapore, Madras

#### Arrival of White Wagtails

Readers will be interested to know that at Pondicherry, on the 28th and 29th August 1971, I saw the White Wagtails (Motacilla alba) with their black bib and white chins and throat, walking and running on the seaside lawn of the Guest House of Shri Aurobindo Ashram. Readers may recall that these are our winter visitors. Have they migrated to the South earlier this year?

S. G. Neginhal  
Hubli, Mysore State

[J. S. Serrao draws my attention to a note published in 1927 by George Brown in J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 32: 375-6, in regard to the presence of Pintail Snipe in Mysore as early as 29.viii.1926 reported by G. V. R. Frend (ibid. 31: 1033). It may answer Mr Neginhal's query above.

George Brown who had watched the NE. migration of birds fairly carefully in the hill districts of Ceylon for some years put forth the view that there is practically always a NE. inclination of the wind (though not always a ground surface wind) some time in August, usually about the time of the full moon. It is during this period of August full moon the first winter bird migrants practically always arrive in the hilly districts of Ceylon, though in very few numbers. Among such earliest arrivals he listed: Common Sandpiper, Grey Wagtail, Bluetailed Bee-eater, Brown Shrike and Pintailed Snipe.

-- Ed./

#### Ruddy Sheldrake in the Borivali National Park

This morning (14.xi.1971) during a visit to the Borivali National Park, I was pleasantly surprised to see a group of nine Ruddy Sheldrake (Tadorna ferruginea) along the grassy

December 1971

meadow of the Vihar Lake. They had their necks tucked into their feathers and appeared to be soundly asleep. The time was c. 10 a.m. Have visitors to this area seen this species here before?

Zafar Futehally

Arrival of Blyth's Reed Warbler

It may interest readers of the Newsletter that Blyth's Reed Warbler (Acrocephalus dumetorum) has arrived at 46 Pali Hill on schedule. It was heard and seen feeding outside Dr Salim Ali's study on 5.xi.1971. The arrival date in 1970 was 6th of November.

J. S. Serrao  
Bombay

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